

Q. How important is continuing the SPLOST sales tax for Union County?

A. It is CRITICAL to the operation and maintenance of Union County. It is our lifeblood. While SPLOST funds themselves can not be used for operation and maintenance, it allows other funds to be freed up for that purpose.

Q. What do you think would happen if the county failed to pass a SPLOST?

Without a SPLOST, we would have to lay off several employees immediately, we would have to severely limit and cut back on almost every program we have in the county from the maintenance of our road system to our recreation programs, our public health and public safety facilities and vehicles, the budget for every single department and elected official would be in jeopardy, and the list would just go on and on at the harm it could do to our county.

Q. Would losing a SPLOST election cause our property taxes to go up?

A. This is one of the questions that if I answer in the positive, some will accuse me of trying to scare people into voting for SPLOST, and nothing could be further from the truth. We want you to vote your conscience. But at the same time, I feel obligated to let everyone know the facts that without SPLOST, it would take a very significant increase in property taxes just to maintain our level of services. It would be devastating to Union County.

Q. Do most other counties in the state have a SPLOST?

A. Yes. Over 90% of the counties in the state have a SPLOST because their citizens understand the importance of this method of keeping property taxes lower and services, infrastructure, and facilities in the best condition possible, while letting visitors to our county help pay for it.

Q. I went to the early voting on continuation of the 1 penny SPLOST and was surprised at how long the ballot question was. Why is it so long and confusing?

A. It is what lawyers, judges and legislators have developed over time to make sure ~~that~~ everything that everything possible is covered that the public needs to know. Basically, it means, if you support SPLOST you can vote yes and if you do not support it you can vote no.

Q. What do the other items mean related to bonds and payments?

A. It is a part of the language of every SPLOST vote we have ever had. Basically, it means that the county has the option of selling bonds to finance some of the SPLOST projects up front and start them now as opposed to waiting until the money is collected over several years.

The theory is that with the cost of inflation, it often saves money to go ahead and borrow some of the money at the beginning of a SPLOST, then pay it ~~off-over~~ off over the six year period of the SPLOST. However, we utilize the services of financial professionals to guide us as to the best way to manage our SPLOST program and finances.

Q. Do SPLOST bond debts have to be paid off during the period of the SPLOST?

A. Yes. We have always done that. The county bonded funds to build the jail, to build the courthouse, and to build many of the county projects over the past four years. In each case, and with the current SPLOST, all of the SPLOST bond indebtedness must be paid off during the period of the SPLOST, which is the beauty of the program.

Q. How much money did the county bond for the current SPLOST (IV)?

A. Up to \$15 million was authorized by voters; however we chose to only bond \$5 million. In SPLOST III we bonded \$6.9 million to build the courthouse and it was paid off in 2009. Prior to those bonds were issued for the jail construction by the previous commissioner and paid off in 2001. In each case it was paid off and each month, before any SPLOST funds are expended, we first set aside money to pay off the SPLOST Bond, which guarantees that it will be paid off during the six years of the SPLOST.

Q. Was the Union County Community Center built with SPLOST bonds?

A. No. It was built with separate Urban Redevelopment Bonds to be paid back over a 20 year period from the issuance in 2010 (final payment of August 1, 2030).. However, our goal is during the SPLOST IV period (if approved) that we will not only pay off any SPLOST bond indebtedness, but hope to pay for most or all of the URA Bond.

Q. Does Union County have a lot of debt as other surrounding counties have?

A. No. Our only debt is the current SPLOST bond which will be paid off in March of 2015, which was \$5 million initially, but now has a balance of \$ 1,755,000, and the Community Center loan which is \$5,105,000. The goal will be to pay off the community center during the six year period of our next SPLOST leaving the county with zero debt.

Q. Is Union County in good financial condition?

A. We are in excellent financial condition!! We have not had to lay off any employees or furlough anyone. We have been able to give raises the past two years, (2% and 3%) and we have been able to pay all our bills and we have an A+ credit rating from Standard and Poor's, one of the best county ratings in the area.

Q. Are there other ways to determine how a county manages their finances?

A. Absolutely. First, something you would not see, ~~our~~, our vendors appreciate the fact that they are paid in full and on time each month. We have not had to borrow any money (Tax Anticipation Notes) to operate the county on and we have a cash reserve. So if you hear anything to the contrary, it is simply not true.

Q. Someone left an information packet illegally attached to our mail box that was opposed to the SPLOST vote and had a lot of false information in there about you and others. Can they legally attach these items to our mail boxes?

A. NO !! It is an absolute violation of federal law and is a crime of theft from the Postal Service of thousands of dollars in lost postage. At a minimum, this group will have to pay the Post Office for all items hung on mail boxes and those involved could also be arrested and or prosecuted.

Q. What can be done about the misinformation in the packet delivered to our mailbox by this group?

A. There is nothing anyone can do because we are a country of free speech. It does not matter if it is true or false. As for the misrepresented information and lies contained in the distributed document, all I can tell you is that this is the same little group that had WSB-TV's investigative reporter Richard Belcher come to Union County a couple of years ago and investigate the SPLOST funded Horse Arena and the same group that paid George Anderson, the state's most notorious government corruption investigator (called gadfly) to come investigate me and Union County. Richard Belcher determined that we had in fact built the horse arena under budget with nothing else wrong, while George Anderson, after spending weeks researching their complaints and spending over 12 hours grilling me personally with questions, realized there was absolutely no wrong doing in the county and the complaints from this group were misrepresented or simply made up. This renegade group then sued George Anderson because he found nothing against me or the county. There is a lot more I would like to say about this group, but for now, it is better unsaid.

Please remember to early vote this week through Friday (8 am till 4:30 pm) and next week you can only vote at the polls on Tuesday, November 5th from 7am till 7pm. Please remember to vote and thank you for supporting what is best for Union County.

Lamar Paris
Union County Commissioner